

Training videos earn failing grades

Now there's an alternative to studying thick software manuals: videotape instruction.

Many companies offer training tapes on a wide variety of computer programs. I tested three currently offered for WordPerfect, the popular word processing program.

Learning WordPerfect — or any other software program — by just watching TV is a promising idea. But there are some problems that prevent this approach from being effective. Besides, there is an excellent training program for WordPerfect available for free.

The three instructional tapes I tested were:

■ Anderson Soft-Teach is available in two versions — WordPerfect: Mastering Word Processing; and WordPerfect: Advanced Techniques. The cost is \$275 each or \$495 for the set. Each version includes an hour-long tape, training guidebook, and a practice disk with example files. Overhead transparencies are available for group sessions.

I found it professionally done,



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■ Learn-PC is a three-part set: Beginning, intermediate and advanced. This program is the most expensive at \$895. Each set includes three videos, participant guidebooks and practice files on a disk. The total running time for all the videos is almost five hours.

While this is the most comprehensive video package, its long running time creates a sluggish pace for all the lessons. I was bored to tears.

The tape set can be obtained from Learn-PC, 5101 Highway 55, Minneapolis, Minn. 55422.

■ Video Professor has two tapes

but slow-paced and lacking detail when it came to the more advanced commands. The tapes are available from Anderson Soft-Teach, 2680 N. First St., San Jose, Calif. 95134.

available for WordPerfect's latest version: Introduction to WP 5.0 and WP 5.0 Update. The latter is handy for those struggling with the transition from version 4.2 to 5.0. Intermediate and advanced tapes are slated for the future, though they are available for 4.2. There is no software or guidebooks included with this series. At only \$24.95 each, however, these tapes are by far the most reasonable.

The pace in this series is more brisk than the other two, and even uses a humorous approach to aid the student. It's sometimes amateurish, but is clearly the best of the three. The tapes are produced by Video Professor Industries Inc., 700 Kipling, Suite 1000, Lakewood, Colo. 80215.

The real advantage to using tapes is that they are easy to take home and play at your leisure on a VCR.

On the downside, I found that all the training videos for WordPerfect glossed over the most complicated commands. None included instruction on how to use WordPerfect's math commands, which

are vital in typing any documents with columns of figures.

As a reference tool, videos are also practically useless. There is no easy way to zip to a precise topic on a tape.

Owners of WordPerfect 5.0, however, already own a superb teaching aid: a software program found on the "Learn" disk. This tutorial is more than mere practice files, as the three packages reviewed. It is a true interactive program that cleverly prompts for commands and describes WordPerfect features within boxed areas of the screen.

■ The bottom line: Firms offering videotape training are at a disadvantage. The technology at their disposal just isn't good enough.

For WordPerfect users, meanwhile, the best training program is already included with their program.

Hillel Segal's weekly column evaluates gadgets, small-computer hardware and software, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity.